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*The Wisdom of this World
made Foolish.*

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S E R M O N

Preach'd at the

Merchants Lecture

I N

BROAD-STREET.

By MATTHEW CLARKE.

L O N D O N :

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To those GENTLEMEN,
MERCHANTS, and CITI-
ZENS, who manage and
promote the *Tuesday's*
Lecture at *Pinner's-Hall*.

S I R S,

THE following Sermon, with
some little Variation, was
preach'd in the ordinary Course
of that Lecture, which you so generously
support, with no more Thought of its ap-
pearing thus in publick, than any other
Discourses of mine in that Place, and
that is, I assure you, with none at all.
How it comes to be otherwise, I believe
very few will think it worth their while
to enquire; and since none are much
concern'd to know it would be a needless
thing for me to inform them. Some of you
are my Witnesses in this Matter, and
can tell to whom this Publication is
owing, The

The DEDICATION.

The general Design of it is sufficiently warranted by the Holy Scriptures, and by that part of them in particular, upon which it's founded. This can't be expos'd without bantering the Holy Ghost himself, who has expresly told us by the Apostle; If any Man seem to be wise in this World, he must become a Fool, that he may be so.

1 Cor. 3.
18.

The manner of handling the Argument, is what every one will judge of as he pleases. What has so many Defects, is like to meet with many Censures; and as there's but too much Cause to expect them, there wants not this Reason, why they should be patiently undergone, that I have brought them upon my self.

This Dedication brings to mind, a Sermon preach'd and printed immediately after, and with a special Eye to that surprizing Revolution, brought about as an Instrument in God's Hand, by the then Prince of Orange, and afterwards great King William; the happy Effects of whose Reign we now see amongst many others, in the peaceable Accession of his present Majesty King George, to the Throne of these Nations.

I can't but further observe, with Reference to that Sermon, its being inscrib'd

The DEDICATION.

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to several Persons by Name, who were then, as you now are, Supporters of this Lecture; and if I mistake not, but one of all that are there mention'd, remains alive at this Day. It's a melancholy Reflection, which one can hardly avoid making, That so great a Number of excellent Persons, both Ministers and others, should be gather'd to their Fathers in that space of Time. This indeed is what might be expected in the ordinary Course of Things; for our Fathers and the Prophets do not live for ever! What adds to the Concern is, that these being remov'd, there's so little of their excellent Spirit resting upon those that stand up in their stead. That there are, however at this Day so many in their Room, with any good Measure of their Spirit, to dispense and support the glorious Gospel, in this, as also in other Places, is Matter of great Thankfulness, and shou'd be acknowledg'd to his Praise, whose I trust we are, and whom we desire to serve.

May that God, in whose Hands our Times are, and who disposes of us as he pleases, preserve you many Years great Blessings in your Day and Places; and when (as so many others have done before us) you, and
we,

we, shall have finish'd our Course, may we be receiv'd into the Joy of our Lord; and leave the World with the comfortable Prospect of a rising Generation to stand up in our Room, for the Support and Encouragement of an Interest, which how much soever despis'd and deserted, we need be in no pain for, being assur'd it's no other than that of the Blessed Jesus himself, who hath all Power in Heaven and Earth in his Hand, and being faithful to his Trust, will preserve it in the World till Time shall be no more.

I gladly take hold of this Opportunity (a Thing I never expected) of making a publick Acknowledgment of the many Obligations some of you, more especially have laid me under, and of assuring you all, that I am, with great Respect,

Your faithful Friend,

and humble Servant,

Sept. 17.
1714.

M. CLARKE.

The Wisdom of this World

- been declared to him by others, That there
- Ver. 11. were very warm and unchristian Contentions among them ; occasion'd *by*, and expressing themselves *in* their undue and partial preferring one Minister to another. *Now this*
- Ver. 12. *I say*, (and reprove you for it) *that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ.* And, to shew himself impartial in his Reproofs, he singles out his own Admirers, and in a particular manner expostulates with them, *Was*
- Ver. 13. *Paul crucified for you ? or were you baptized in the Name of Paul ?* I baptized very few of you, that not being the Work to which I was principally called. My Business was rather to preach the Gospel. *Christ sent me*
- Ver. 17. *not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel.* And having mentioned his principal Work as an Apostle, he takes occasion from thence to tell them, How and in what manner he performed it ; *not with Wisdom of Words, lest the Cross of Christ should be made of none effect.* Wherein he returns to his former Argument, and obliquely touches upon the Cause of their unhappy Divisions, *viz.* The Vanity of some Teachers, who affected a Name for Wisdom and Eloquence ; and the Folly of some Hearers, who admir'd 'em upon that account. This the Apostle tells them he had carefully avoided, and for this reason, *lest the Cross of Christ should be made of none effect, i. e.* Left the plain, simple Preaching of a crucified Christ, should be thought insufficient to work Faith, and command their Belief, without the
- Assist-

Assistance and Force of Human Wisdom and Eloquence; and the Effects of it should rather be ascribed to the Arguments and Perswasions of Men, than the Efficacy and Power of God.

This, he owns, is thought Foolishness, Ver. 18. and therefore rejected (tho' to their own Ruin) by those that value themselves upon the Profoundness of their Learning, and the Justness of their own Reasoning. But be it so; The Apostle proceeds in his own Method, and wont be put out of his Way by all that Contempt they pour upon it; for tho' this be Foolishness to them that perish, it's the Power of God to them that are saved. Nor was he much concern'd to appear with this sort of Wisdom, since it's written, God Ver. 19. *will destroy the Wisdom of the Wise, and bring to nothing the Understanding of the Prudent.* Yea according to this Prophecy he hath already done it; the Gospel of Christ, wherever it comes, having triumphed over and baffled all the Learning of this World, which he plainly insinuates in the following Enquiries: *Where is the Wise? where is the Scribe? Where is the Disputer of this World?*

Where some think he touches upon three sorts of Doctors among the Jews, and that J. Scal. the *Wise* signify their Learned Rabbies; the Elen. tri- *Scribe*, the Lawyer of the People; the Dis- har. Ser- puter, one that gives the Mystical Sense of rar. p. 267i Scripture, and whose Commentaries are full of Questions.

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Others suppose, that by the *Wise*, he means the Philosophers and Learned Men among the Heathen; by the *Scribe*, the Doctors and Men of Learning, distinguish'd from the common People among the *Jews*; and especially the Fathers of some Traditions: By the *Disputer* or *Enquirer*, either one that doth more profoundly interpret the Law, or that searches deep into Phisical Causes, and can best solve the *Phænomena's* of Nature.

Once more: By the *Wise* may be meant the great Statesman and Politician; by the *Scribe*, one that wholly employs himself and spends all his Time in tumbling over Volumes of Learned Men to get Wisdom; and by the *Disputer* of this World, one that searches into subtle Questions, and as a Man of Disquisition, dives into the Mysteries of Nature, or one that is a shrewd Disputer in the *Jewish* Schools concerning their Traditions. These (whoever are intended) the Apostle insults and triumphs over, referring it to themselves and others, what these had ever done to bring Men to the true Knowledge of God and His Will. Where's the Wisdom of the Philosophers among the Gentiles? and of the Interpreters of the Law among the *Jews*? What's become of the great Statesman and Politician; of the profound Scholar, or the curious Enquirer and Men of Disquisition? What's become of them, of their Wisdom and Learning? What did these avail to secure themselves, prolong their Lives, or save their
their

made Foolish.

their Souls? *Hath not God made foolish the Wisdom of this World? i. e.* Manifested it to be errant Folly, in comparison of that Way He hath chosen, for the bringing Men to the Knowledge of Himself, and to Happiness and Salvation thereby. And thus we are brought to the Words of the Text, in opening of which I shall endeavour to shew,

- I. What we are to understand by the Wisdom of this World.
- II. How and in what Sense God makes it foolish.
- III. For what Reason and why he doth so. And then,
- IV. What Use we *may* and *should* make of the whole.

Let us then enquire,

- I. What we are to understand by the Wisdom of this World.

I shall deliver my Thoughts of it in the three following Particulars.

1. *Natural Reason, improv'd by great Industry and Diligence, to a considerable Degree of Learning and Knowledge.*

When *Moses* is said to be learned in all Acts 7. the *Wisdom* of the *Egyptians*, it is as much 22. as to say he was a good Scholar, well skill'd in prophane Arts and Sciences, and had attain'd an eminent Degree of Human Literature. This was the Wisdom of the *Egyptians*. This is at least one probable Sense of the

Rom. 1.
14.

Ver. 22.

the Apostle's Words, *Ver. 21. For after that in the Wisdom of God, the World by Wisdom knew not God, &c. i. e.* By all their natural Light and acquired Learning they could never arrive at the true Knowledge of God. The Apostle distinguishes the *World* into the *Greek and Barbarian, the Wise and Unwise, i. e. the Learned and Unlearned.* The *Wise* were the Philosophers of *Greece* and the Oratours of *Rome*. This is what the *Greeks* sought after and expected to find in the Gospel: *The Greeks seek after Wisdom*; something that has in it profound Learning, and is agreeable to the Principles of their Reason and Philosophy. But God has chosen the *foolish things of this World, i. e.* Men of little Esteem in the World, that have no Name either for their *natural, or acquired and learned Accomplishments*: God at first chose these to confound the *Wise*, to silence and non-plus the *Rabbies of the Church*, and the *Learned Philosophers of the Age*. By the *Wisdom then of this World*, I understand that which the meer natural Man may be endued with, and attain unto, by his own Abilities, improv'd by severe Studies, and which gives him the Name and Reputation of a *Learned Man*.

2. *The Discoveries which these Learned Men make, and their Contrivances for the bringing about that End, which they propound to themselves or others.*

And here I intend the *Wisdom both of the Statesman and Politician*; and that of the *Mora-*

Moralist and Philosopher, *i. e.* Political and Moral Wisdom. The former Notion of worldly Wisdom cou'd not be wholly disregarded, without a manifest overlooking the Context. Some suppose the Apostle refers to this in that Question, *Where is the Wise?* *i. e.* the great Statesman and Politician. And those Passages in the Old Testament, (*Job* 5. 12. *Isa.* 29. 14.) which it's probable the Apostle aim'd at, when he says, *it's written*, do manifestly lead to this, as that Wisdom which it's there foretold God would destroy and bring to nothing. Taking it in this Sense, by the Wisdom of this World I understand the various Projects and Contrivances of Human Policy to bring about its Ends. *Achitophel* was a Man fam'd for this Wisdom, reputed an Oracle in his Day, and consulted with as such upon all Occasions: His Counsel which he counselled in those Days, ^{2 Sam. 16.} was as if a Man had enquired at the Oracle ^{23.} of God. This Counsel was the Wisdom of the World, the Projects and Contrivances of that Wisdom to bring about a designed End.

The other sort of Worldly Wisdom is that of the Moralist and Philosopher; and by this I understand the Rules and Dictates of Learned Men for bringing Persons to the Enjoyment of true and lasting Happiness. The Writings of learned Men may very properly be stiled their Wisdom, as those of the sacred Scriptures are call'd *the Wisdom of God* (*Luke* 11. 49.) Here it is they shew the utmost of their Knowledge and Skill, and give Specimens

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Ver. 19.

timens of their Wisdom, in directing Men to the Paths of Rest and Happiness. This being that common Centre in which all Mens Desires meet, and the Port at which they would willingly arrive, the Wisdom of this World pretends not only to tell us what it is, and wherein it consists, but also how it may be obtain'd, and what Course it's necessary we steer, in order to the arriving at this Haven of Rest; tho' in all these things it's evident they are greatly at a loss, and miserably divided among themselves. In this Sense I understand those Words of the Apostle: *For it is written, I will destroy the Wisdom of the Wise, and bring to nothing the Understanding of the Prudent*: He is shewing what Way the Wisdom of God pitch'd upon for Man's Happiness and Salvation, viz: the Death of Christ. Now this Contrivance of Infinite Wisdom is pronounc'd Foolishness by the Wisdom of the World. The Way of saving us by a crucified Christ, to the Learned *Greeks is Foolishness*, Ver. 18. 23. They think it a vain and foolish thing to attempt or expect it this way, and will therefore substitute something else in the room of it; and this I call the Wisdom of the World, which God maketh foolish. The Theorems of their Moral and Practick Philosophy; their Rules and Prescriptions of Vertue; their Discourses of the Gods, and the Worship due to 'em; their Sacrifices whereby to atone and pacify them in answer to such an Enquiry as that, *Wherewith shall I come before the*

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the Lord ? and bow my self before the most high, &c. This is the Wisdom of the World ; their Reasonings and Contrivances for bringing Men to God, or securing themselves against him ; these are the Thoughts of worldly Wisdom, which the Lord knows are vain. 1 Cor. 3. 20.

3. *The Way which this Wisdom prescribes, and the Methods it makes use of, the more effectually to recommend these Contrivances to the World. By this I intend, what the Apostle so often disclaims, and insinuates did very much obtain among learned Writers. The Wisdom of Words ; 1 Cor. 1. The enticing Words of Man's Wisdom ; the 17. Wisdom of Men, 1 Cor. 2. 4, 5. And again, We speak Wisdom among them that are perfect ; howbeit not the Wisdom of this World, not in the Words which Man's Wisdom teaches, v. 13. Corinth was a City, that abounded with Philosophers and Rhetoricians, whose Discourses and Writings were full of human Wisdom ; and this Wisdom they sought for in the Gospel. The Jews require a Sign, the Greeks seek after Wisdom ; something that had in it profound Learning, and exact Oratory ; wherein Beauty was added to Language, the better to engage their Attention, and the more easily to command their Belief. The Apostle had an Eloquence in his Preaching and Writing ; We speak Wisdom (says he) among them that are perfect, but then such only as was agreeable to the Simplicity and Majesty of the Gospel, and all other Wisdom he disclaims, as that*

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which God would make foolish ; which that he *hath* done, and *how*, comes now to be shew'd ;

II. In what Sense then, and how does God make foolish the Wisdom of this World ? That he hath done so, is implied in the Question ; *Hath not God made foolish the Wisdom of this World ?* certainly he has ; but how ? I answer, Not by destroying the Exercise of Reason, or the Use of Learning ; as if the holiest Men must needs be the greatest Fools : Reason and Religion are at no such odds, that they cannot consist together. There's no Occasion for Men to lay aside their Learning, when they enter into Christ's School, nor are they requir'd to abandon all just Reasoning and Argumentation as carnal and useless things, when they come to know the Truth as it is in Jesus. The converting Men to Christianity don't turn them into Fools and Ideots. No ! these things are excellent in themselves, and may be made very serviceable to Religion, whilst they act ministerially, and serve as an Handmaid, to attend upon and open the Word, tho' without this they are all weak and defective. They are Gifts of God, and as the Spoils of the *Egyptians* were dedicated to the Service of the Tabernacle, may be of singular Use to the Church. In the first planting of the Gospel, God made little Use of these things ; the Want of them being supplied by extraordinary Gifts and im-
mediate

mediate Inspiration ; without Learning the Apostles were able to speak in divers Tongues. But when no such immediate Inspiration can be expected or pretended to, it must be great Weakness to suppose that God, by making foolish the Wisdom of this World, has destroy'd either the Exercise of Reason, or the Necessity and Usefulness of Learning. No Man can discredit Human Learning, but he must at the same time disparage his own Understanding. It's an Attempt, says an ingenious * Person, that * Preface
would be impracticable ; because if well *to Reflections on Human Learning.*
done, it must be by Arguments drawn from the Store-House of Learning ; and then at the same time we are reasoning against it, we are really arguing for it, and prove the Usefulness of what we pretend to decry. If it's ill done, and the Performance be unlearned, it's to no purpose, and might as well have been let alone, and shews withal the Need of what we are denying. But then it may be too much magnified, and is so when Men are fond of their Learning, to the Loss of their Religion. It must not be suffer'd to usurp, but taught its Duty, and kept in its Place. Here we must deny our selves, not affect to shew it, nor value our selves too much upon it ; but if any Man among you seemeth to be *I Cor. 3.*
wise, in the Wisdom and Learning of this World, *18.*
let him become a Fool, as to this, that he may be wise indeed, according to and with the Wisdom of God, for God maketh foolish the Wisdom of this World ; i.e. he declares and manifests it *in weakness ;*

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to be foolish, insulse and unfavoury, having nothing in it that's excellent, compar'd with the Wisdom of God and Knowledge of Christ. He infatuates this Wisdom, pours Contempt upon it, and proves it to be errant Folly. And this he doth various Ways.

1. *By disappointing the Devices of carnal Wisdom and Policy.* The Wisdom of the World takes crafty Counsel against God's People, and consults against his hidden ones, saying, *Come and let us cut them off from being a Nation, that the Name of Israel be no more in Remembrance:* And vain Man thinks himself so wise, and his Schemes so well concerted, that nothing shall be able to hinder their Execution. But it's written, *I will destroy the Wisdom of the Wise, and bring to nothing the Understanding of the Prudent: where is the Wise?* The great Statesman and Politician; what's become of him and his well concerted Schemes? Hath not God made foolish the Wisdom of the World? and this, by giving them up to foolish and destructive Counsels, which tend to their own Ruin, or turning the wisest Counsels into Foolishness, and not suffering them to be follow'd, where he takes the Wise in their own Craftiness, and carries the Counsel of the Froward headlong; for there is no Wisdom, nor Understanding, nor Counsel against the Lord. He frustrates the Tokens of Liars, makes Diviners mad; he turns the wise Men backwards, and makes their Knowledge foolish. Pharoah went cunningly to work,

Psal. 83.
3, 4.

1 Cor. 1.
19, 20.

Job 5.
12.

Prov. 21.
30.
Isa. 44.
25.

work, having a Design to wear out the whole Race of *Israel*, that there might not be so much as the Name of an *Israelite* left; He said unto his People, come on, let us deal *Exod. 17* wisely with them, lest they multiply; do all we ^{10.} can to suppress and keep them under, lest they grow dangerous by their Numbers, &c. Here's the Wisdom of the World, and its Politick Contrivances; but observe how God made this foolish; he baffl'd the whole Design, and made it work quite contrary to their Expectation; for the more he afflicted them, the more they grew. What he design'd should in time root out the whole Race, serv'd only to encrease their Number.

Achitophel was a deep Politician, a Man of a long Head, the Oracle of his Day for *2 Sam. 7* Wisdom; this render'd *Absalom's* Conspira- ^{14.}cy against *David* the more formidable and dangerous; but God made foolish this Man's Wisdom, by turning his Counsel backwards to his own Ruin, and *Absalom's* Overthrow, for God was purpos'd to destroy it.

Haman was a daring Man, and a bitter Enemy to the *Jews*, against whom he devis'd an evil Device, which prosper'd for a while; but tho' he began to build, he was not able to finish; his Politick Contrivance only brought himself to the Gallows, and rais'd the Man he desig'd to ruin. He conceiv'd Mischief, but brought forth Vanity. He ^{Psal. 7: 14, 15, 16.} made a Pit, and digg'd it; but fell into the Ditch which he had made. His Mischief return'd

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turn'd upon his own Head, and his violent Dealing came down upon his own Pate. Such Things as these God has done, and proceeds to do in the Course of his Providence. For

IIa. 29. the Wisdom of their wise Men shall perish, and
 4, 15, 16. the Understanding of their prudent Men shall be hid. Woe therefore to them that seek deep to hide their Counsel from the Lord, and their Works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? And who knoweth us? Surely your turning things upside-down shall be as the Potters Clay; your subtle Devices are easily alter'd, as the Clay by the Hands of the Potter. For the Lord bringeth to nought the Counsel of the Heathen, he maketh the Devices of the People of none Effect; but the Counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, and the Thoughts of his Heart to all Generations.

Psal. 33.
 10, 11.

2. By evidencing the Insufficiency of human Wisdom, to conduct Men to true Happiness; in that it cannot furnish them with any account at all of many things they are concern'd to know, nor give them distinct and satisfactory Notions, even of those things they are not altogether ignorant of. For Instance,

1st. The Wisdom of this World could never discover nor bring Men to the Knowledge of the true God. Some Notions indeed they had of the supream Being; but how dark and confus'd, is evident to any one that enquires into this Matter; which makes good the Apostle's Observation, *That the World by Wisdom knew not God.* How wise so ever they thought and profess'd themselves,

I Cor. I.
 21.

selves, herein they shew'd their Weakness and Folly ; that they never could of themselves, and by all their Wisdom and Philosophy come to the true Knowledge of their Creator, tho' it's certain *he was not far from any of them, for in him they liv'd and mov'd, and had their Being.* Tho' the Works of Nature in every part of 'em sufficiently evidenc'd a Deity, either the World made so little use of their Reason, that they saw him not at all, when by the Impressions of himself he was easy to be found ; or at best, never attained by all their natural Light and Contemplation, such a Knowledge of God, as freed 'em from the grossest Conceptions of him, and was sufficient to bring them at present to a Life of Holiness, or to a State of Happiness hereafter. We may tumble over the Books of all the Philosophers, and yet never by these come to frame just Notions of God in our Mind, so foolish and contemptible is the Wisdom of the World ; and therefore it pleases God by the Foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.

2dly. The Wisdom of this World can give no just nor satisfactory Account of the Entrance of Sin. Some thing indeed may, and cannot but be perceiv'd by this Light, of the Disorder and Irregularity of the human Soul ; the Disease is not altogether hid from them ; there is something in us, says *Aristotle*, repugnant to right Reason. It's *Augustine's* Observation ; this *Tully* saw the Thing, the *Disease*, but knew not the *Cause*.
None

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None of the wise Men of this World could ever of themselves hit upon Sin's true Genealogy; something they felt of the Disease, but could never yet find out how and which way they took the Infection. They see themselves in a Pit, but know not who threw them in. The Original Cause and Manner of Sin's Traduction, they know nothing of. And as this Wisdom could not hit upon the *Cause*, so nor,

3dly, Find out the *Cure* of this Disease. The most exact Insight into natural Causes and Effects, leaves the Mind ignorant of true Happiness, and the Way to attain it. Men waste their Candle in vain, whilst searching after it by this Light; all their Contrivances to subdue their Passions, quiet their Consciences, to expiate their Sins, and appease their Deities, are at the best, vain and trifling, in many Instances of them monstrous and absurd. The Morality of the *Gentiles* was evidently defective herein; their Philosophy seem'd to have spent its Strength, and done its utmost, yet was not sufficient nor effectual to Man in this imperfect State. Some of 'em indeed had juster Notions of God, the Soul, and future Retributions than others; and in some of their Writings, are found fine Strokes and scatter'd Sayings; yet even the best of 'em express'd themselves too doubtfully to be depended on, and were far from arriving at any thing that could settle the Mind of Man in the Discharge of his Duty, especially
under

under the greatest Pressures and Difficulties. Their Institutions were so very uncertain and slippery, a Man could not find any thing stable enough whereon to fix his Foot, and prevent endless Doubts and Wavering. Besides many of 'em espous'd Principles manifestly false and absurd, serving only to expose the Folly of their Authors: As that all the Blessedness we prosecute in the Course of Vertue, was to be enjoy'd in this mortal Life; and to say a Man was happy after Death, was altogether absurd: yea such Rules and Prescriptions they give concerning Vertue, that it's hard to say what it is. Some taught that, in order to make Men happy, they must live up to Nature, endeavour to be rich, and powerful, and every thing that was easy; divest themselves of Humanity, and be absolutely unconcern'd at any thing that should befall 'em. Others came to question all, and think nothing was true or false, good or evil; and that Happiness lay in a perfect Indifference, pretending even in Torments to feel *no Pain*, and to taste Happiness, and not be affected with *Pleasure*. But what is this *Chaff to the Wheat*? Yea, what are all their most celebrated Theorems to Divine Institutions and Gospel Rules? *The Lord knows, the Thoughts of the Wise* 1 Cor. 3. *that they are vain.* That the best Contrivances of worldly Wisdom and Learning, for the bringing Men to God and Happiness in him, are foolish in themselves, and unprofitable to them. Whoever will collect
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the moral Rules of Philosophers, and compare them with what is contain'd in the sacred Scriptures, will easily observe how wide the Difference is, and that God, by giving so much better an Institution, has made foolish the Wisdom of this World. If they had so much Light as to perceive their own Wandrings, they knew not how to remedy these Disorders, nor return into the Way for want of a proper Guide. They were not agreed among themselves wherein that Happiness consisted, which they were in the Pursuit of. Their different Opinions concerning it were so extravagantly multiplied, that they amounted to no less than 288, according to *Augustine's* Observation from *Varro*. And if the Difference concerning the ultimate End, in which, if in any thing, the common Sense of Mankind should agree, was so great; we may easily imagine what Agreement there was like to be among them, concerning the way and means of attaining it. We find all their moral Philosophy, their best Ethicks strangely puzzl'd and confus'd, for want of the Assistance of a particular Divine Revelation; tho' these Sparks struck out of the Light of Nature might give 'em some Direction, they fail'd all Mankind as a perfect Rule. A celebrated Writer, after he has imputed the Barbarism of the World to the crafty Management of Priests, yet owns it's too hard a thing for Reason to establish Morality in all its Parts upon its true Foundations, with a clear and convincing Light.

*Aug. de
Civitat.
Dei, l. 19.
c. 1.*

*Reasona-
bleness of
Christia-
nity, pag.
265.*

Light. We see, says he, how unsuccessful in this the Attempts of Philosophers were before our Saviour's time. How short their Systems came of a true and compleat Morality is very visible. And again, whatever was the Cause, it's plain in Fact, that human Reason unassisted, fail'd Men in its great and proper Business of Morality.

3. *By leaving Men to the Conduct of their own Wisdom, and suffering them to run into the grossest Follies and Absurdities.* Let any Man be left to his own Wisdom, and it will soon shew it self to be errant Folly. When *Saul* acted under the Conduct of his own Understanding, *Samuel* tells him he play'd the Fool. God turns wise Men backward, and maketh their Knowledge foolish, by leaving them to themselves, and giving them up to their own Counsels, which will always prove ruinous and destructive. Nothing will be more vain and absurd in its Imaginations, than the Wisdom of Man when left to it self, as appears,

In its Determinations, both concerning the World, and the Creator of it.

Concerning the World. The Wisdom of Man fancies it to be eternal; or the Product of mere Chance and blind Fortune, owing its Original to a casual and fortuitous Concourse of Atoms jumbled together, and falling no one knows how, into such a regular Order and System. Is this indeed to be wise? Or rather could any thing be more absurd and irrational? Is it not evident from hence, that

the Wisdom of the World is foolish? And it ever will be so when left to it self.

Rom. I.
21.

The Imaginations of human Wisdom are no less vain, concerning God himself, his Nature, Worship, and Providence. The Heathens professing themselves to be wise, usurping to themselves both the Name and Thing, as if Wisdom must needs live and die with them, being left to themselves, became the most foolish of Creatures in their Reasonings and Imaginations, changing the Glory of the Incorruptible God, into an Image made like to corruptible Men, and Birds, and four footed Beasts, and creeping Things. They debas'd the glorious Deity, by forming the most unworthy Conceptions of him, and performing to him such Acts of Worship, as were neither fit for a reasonable Creature to offer, nor the Divine Being to accept. They concluded, that the Gods must be appeas'd for the Sins of Men, and fell into the Notion of Sacrifices for Atonement; and because they could not fully perswade themselves, that this could be done by the Blood of Beasts, they were content to do it with the Lives of Men. In *Africa*, as *Fertullian* tells us, they sacrific'd their Children to *Saturn*. Another tells us, that when the *Carthaginians* were overcome by *Agathocles*, King of the *Sicilians*, to appease their incensed Deities, they sacrificed two hundred noble Mens Sons to *Saturn*. *Cicero* pleading for *Fonteinus*, won't allow the Testimony of the *Gauls* in the Cause, because they were a People that made

Tert.
Apol p.9.
Scorp.
p. 624.

Cic. Orat.
pro Font.

it

it a Part of their Religion, when under any Fear or Distress, to defile the Altars and Temples of their Gods with Human Sacrifices, and retain'd to that Day the barbarous and cruel Custom of sacrificing Men. Of all which we have a particular Representation in that anxious Enquiry, and the Answer to it, *Mic. 6. 6, 7. Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the most High God? Shall I come before him with Burnt-Offerings, with Calves of a Year old? Will the Lord be pleased with Thousands of Rams, or with Ten Thousands of Rivers of Oil? Shall I give my First-born for my Transgression, the Fruit of my Body for the Sin of my Soul?* Such impracticable and barbarous Proposals, under a Sense of Sin, and Fear of Punishment, plainly evidence the Darkness and Folly of Human Wisdom in the Matters of Religion.

And they became no less vain in their Imaginations concerning the Providence of God: One of the Learned among the Heathens, reckons it a thing to be derided and laugh'd at, That the chief Power hath the Care of Mankind, or takes any Notice of his Affairs: *Can we believe, says he, that he should be polluted with so sordid and troublesome a Service?* And towards the latter End of that Chapter, to shew the Thoughts he had of God himself, tells us, it's the chief Comfort of imperfect Nature in Man, that God can't do all things; and among several things he reckons up as Instances of it, these are some, That he can't give mortal Men an Eter-

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Eternity, nor call back the Dead, &c. Well
 Isa. 47.¹⁰ may it be said, *Thy Knowledge and thy Wisdom hath perverted thee* ; this high Conceit of thy own Wisdom hath misled thee, and carried thee into the Way of Sin and Destruction.
 Rom. 1. 22. *on. Professing themselves to be wise, pretending to it, and glorying in it, they shew themselves to be Fools,* and die at last without Wisdom.
 Job 4. 21. *How then do you say, we are wise? Is it not manifest, that the Wisdom of this World is Foolishness? Whenever Men are to shape a Religion to themselves by the Light, and under the Conduct of their own Reason, they run into a thousand Follies, and, notwithstanding all their Pretences to, and Boasts of Wisdom, by the Vanity of their Imaginations shew themselves Fools.*

4. *By establishing such a System of Truths, as the Wisdom of this World could never have pitch'd on without a particular Revelation.* There are many things in the Gospel so much out of the way, that no Human Wisdom could once have had a Thought of, unless God had reveal'd 'em to us by his Word. The great Doctrine of Salvation by an Incarnate God, obeying and dying in our Nature and Place, was a Contrivance could never have enter'd into the Heart of Man, how fruitful soever in other Inventions. To contrive a Way wherein God's Honour might be effectually secur'd, and Man's Safety at the same time as fully provided for ; and then to find out a Person fit for, and equal

equal to this Undertaking, is a Difficulty that would have nonplust the Wisdom of all the Angels in Heaven, and much more of all the Men on Earth.

This is *Nodus Deo vindice dignus*. The Thoughts of the wisest Men could never have waded into this Depth. Herein appears the manifold Wisdom of God; and this makes foolish the Wisdom of the World, being so much above its reach. This lay hid in God, as a Plot that could never have been form'd in the Womb of any created Understanding: It far transcends its utmost reach. The most enquiring Genius could never have hit upon it. It might as soon have enter'd into the Head of an *Israelite*, that the looking to a Brazen Serpent erected on a Pole, should heal the Wounds given him by a fiery Serpent; as it could have enter'd into the Heart of Man to imagine, that the Stripes of a dying Person should be the healing of those Wounds, which Sin had caused in the Souls of Men.

5. By propounding those Truths to our Belief, which the Wisdom of Man cannot fully comprehend, even when they are reveal'd. Now that the great Truths of the Gospel are brought to light, such as the Doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation of the Eternal Word, Justification by another's Righteousness, the Resurrection of the same Body from the Dead, &c. how does the Wisdom of Man stand gazing at 'em, as things too big to be grasp'd by

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by its short Span. When our Line has run its utmost Length, we must sit down on the Brink, and with Amazement cry out, Oh the Depth! Such Knowledge is too wonderful for us. The Wisdom of Man is so far from discovering them, that when they are reveal'd, it cannot comprehend them. These are Discoveries altogether supernatural. Most, if not all Attempts of Learned Men to explain the *Modus* of 'em, especially that of the Trinity, and to accommodate them to the Reason and Reach of Man, *darken* at least, if they don't *give up*, the very thing *we* contend for, and *they* pretend to unfold. These Doctrines, as one observes, are like a Temple fill'd with Smoke, which not only hinders the View of the quickest Eye; but hurts the Sight of such as dare with an undue Curiosity pry into them. Thus by revealing what so far exceeds our Comprehension, and obliging us to believe things so much above our Reason, tho' not contrary to it, God makes foolish the Wisdom of this World.

6. *By acting in a way so very different from, and contrary to the Methods, which Human Wisdom would dictate in our Salvation.* God will have those Signatures upon his own Proceedings, which shall distinguish them from all Human Contrivances whatsoever. The Wisdom of this World shall never chalk out a Way for him to walk in. His Designs are not laid according to the Schemes of Men,
but

but pursued in Methods suitable to the Greatness of his own Wisdom, that the less of Man, and the more of himself, might appear in them; and to make good what he speaks by the Prophet, *My Thoughts are not as your Thoughts, nor my Ways as your Ways*; but my Ways and Methods of bringing Men to Happiness, are as much above, and as widely different from your Ways, as the Heavens are distant from and above the Earth. And this in sundry Instances.

1. *In the Person appointed to be the Saviour and Redeemer of his People.* The Blessed God from everlasting determin'd to glorify himself in rescuing a Number of *Adam's* Posterity from those Miseries into which the first Apostacy plung'd both himself and them. But how shall this be effected? Which way shall this glorious Design be brought about? Consult the Wisdom of this World; let Human Policy be heard, and it's probable we shall be told, it must be done by the Appearance of some great and extraordinary Person upon the Stage of the World, with the Pomp and Grandeur of a Prince, to answer the Character, and command the Respect of a Deliverer. Let him have a numerous Train to attend him, powerful Armies to fight for him, and large Revenues to reward his Followers; let him live in the utmost Splendour, and be reverenc'd by all for his Wisdom and Power, Authority and Wealth, &c.

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According to Human Policy, when Christ came into the World, he must have acted such a Part as this. *It's fit*, said one of the Heathens, *that if the Son of God come into the World, he appear as the Sun, which renders it self conspicuous by its own Light.*

But God makes foolish the Wisdom of this World, by acting just the Reverse to its Dictates. He saves us indeed by a Great and Renowned Person; but one that is not so in outward Appearance, and the World's Account. He sends his own Son, but under those Circumstances, which render him very unlikely, and in the Judgment of Man's Wisdom very unfit, to be a Deliverer. He was born of poor Parents, and in a very mean way; descended from a Family, which at that Time made no Figure in the World; the Prince's Sceptre being turned into the Carpenter's Ax. He entred and acted upon the Stage of the World under the greatest outward Disadvantages, so that *his own received him not*: They did not know him, would not acknowledge him: this was not the Messiah they looked for. They saw no Form nor Comeliness in him; no outward Advantages or sensible Glory, to attract their Eyes, and command their Respect: They refus'd him, as an unfit Stone to be laid in the Foundation of God's Building. They could not think a Carpenter's Son a proper Person to build God's House; that a Man so long hid among-Chips was born to
fit

fit upon the Royal Throne of *Israel* ; that Hands always us'd to hew Logs of Timber, were made to wield the Sceptre of Heaven and Earth ; and one that wanted all necessary Education, should be the Prophet of God's People ; A Messiah and a King living in Poverty and Persecution, and dying the Death of a Slave and Malefactor, they cou'd not put together.

But this very Person thus rejected by the Builders, God made the Head of the Corner, and by acting herein the Reverse to all Human Policy, made foolish the Wisdom of this World.

2. *In the Means by which, and the Manner wherein this Deliverance is brought about.* After a poor inglorious Life, this Deliverer submits to an ignominious and accursed Death : The very Persons he came to deliver, crucified him as an Impostor ; and the Enemies he came to subdue, seem'd to triumph over him as impotent.

Now what more contemptible in it self, and opposite than this, to Sense and Reason ? The Wisdom of the World pronounces this *Foolishness*, and declares it an Absurdity too 1 Cor. 1. great to be received by Men of Sense. 23.

Such a Man as this save us ! and save us in such a Way ! Is it likely that he should save others, that *could* not, or however *did* not save himself ? Can the Saviour's Death be the Sinner's Life ? Must we depend upon him for Deliverance from Sin and Death, who himself fell under the

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Power of both? Can another's dying on a Cross, and descending into the Grave, be the Means of bringing up a lost World to Life and Immortality? How absurd and ridiculous is this? What can be more incredible and unlikely? Who can hear it, and not be shock'd at the Report? Can this ever be the Way of saving a lost World, says Human Wisdom? Yes! answers the Wisdom of God, this is my Way of saving Sinners; and tho' you call it Foolishness, it is the Wisdom and Power of God to every one that believes, and is saved. It's by this I make foolish all your Wisdom, so ordering it that Death shall be the Means of Life, and Shame the Path to Glory. You shall be heal'd by Stripes, crowned by the Cross, comforted by Sorrows, enrich'd by Poverty, advanced by Disgrace, and quickned by Death. And thus the Wisdom of this World is made foolish, God acting in this great Affair so contrary to all its Rules and Dictates.

3. *The Wisdom of this World is made foolish by the Methods which God takes for the prevailing with Men to accept this Salvation, viz. The Preaching of the Cross, and that in a crucified manner. If Men are to be captivated to the Obedience of Christ, and made subject to the Faith of the Gospel, the Wisdom of the World would suppose it must be done by Might and Power. But the Weapons of our Warfare are not carnal. Christ's Victories are not won by Force of Arms, but the*

2 Cor. 10.

4.

the *Power of the Spirit* ; not by *Might* nor by *Power*, but by my *Spirit*, saith the Lord. The Redeemer of Souls captivates thousands to himself, without drawing any other Sword, than that of the Spirit. If the World is to be turn'd up-side-down, it's by the Foolishness of Preaching. The great Revolutions in Christ's Kingdom are brought about without *Blows* or *Blood-shed*. The strong Holds of Sin and Satan are dismantled, not by the *thundring* of *Canons*, but the soft *Whispers* of *Grace*, and the *gentle Breathings* of the *Word* and *Spirit* ; as unlikely a thing in the Eyes of Men, as the throwing down *Jericho's Walls*, by the Sound of Rams-horns. By this Foolishness of Preaching, this simple, foolish, needless thing, as it's accounted by many, it pleases God to save them that believe. To this add, That the Gospel was to be preach'd in a crucified manner. If such great things must be perform'd by these Means, then according to the Wisdom of this World, it must be done with all the Beauty of Language, and the Arts of Oratory. No, says the Apostle, *My Preaching was not with the enticing Words of Man's Wisdom, but in the Evidence and Demonstration of the Spirit*, that I might commend my self to the Consciences of Men, and their Faith might not seem to stand in the *Wisdom of Man*, but the *Power of God* ; for Divine Truths need not the meretricious Ornaments of human Paint, but shine best in their own Native Beauty.

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4. *By the Instruments which God makes use of and employs in this great Design.* The Wisdom of this World would suppose this great Revolution must be brought about by Men of *Power* and *Authority*, or at least by Persons of the most *refined Parts* and *greatest Accomplishments*; Satan chuses oft times the subtlest Men, and the most learned, desiring, as *Austin* once told a learned young Man, to grace his Cause by such bright Ornaments, and gain it Credit by their Reputation, whom he employs for its Support.

But instead of Philosophers and Statesmen, in the first planting of the Gospel, our Lord made Choice of a few Fishermen to do his Work in the World; Men of a mean Rank and Condition, without the adventitious Helps of human Learning, that knew no Language but that of their Native Country. A Dozen illiterate, naked, unarmed Men, are sent out to turn the World upside-down, and bring Persons to renounce those Idolatries in which they had been born and bred all their Days, and list themselves under a new Master, and he a crucified one. Now this it might be thought, is to affront the World: Are these few silly Men the Persons that must be sent on such an Errand? Are they fit to confound Judaism, over-turn Paganism, and alienate the Minds of Men from those several Opinions, which had been rooted in them by Education, and establish'd by a long Succession?

But

But these are the Men whom the Wisdom of God thought fit to make use of upon this Occasion, how contrary and absurd soever it may appear to the Methods of Human Wisdom. *You see your Calling, Brethren, i. e.* 1 Cor. 1. what Methods God takes, what Instruments *25, 26.* he makes use of in calling you; *Not many mighty, not many noble, not many wise Men after the Flesh,* are employ'd in calling you; but *God hath chosen the foolish Things of this World, to confound the Wise; base things, and things despised, and which are not, to bring to nought things that are.* These shall confound and put to Silence all the learned Doctors and Rabbies of the Age; and thus without the Wisdom of the World, God makes foolish the Wisdom of it.

5. *The Persons, which for the most part, are perswaded and prevail'd upon to embrace the Christian Faith,* is another Instance of this. If God designs to acquire a Reputation and Credit to his Cause, he will sure, says the Wisdom of the World, call in the great ones of the Earth, and Men of Learning to support it by the Force of their Authority, and the Influence of their Examples. Religion will need Men of Learning to support it by their Arguments, and Men of Power to defend it by their Arms: But God's Ways are not as Man's, nor his Thoughts as ours. He maketh foolish the Wisdom of the World, by acting herein contrary to its Dictates.

Tho' he reserves a Liberty to himself, and sometimes goes out of his way, to save some
of

Mat. 11.
25.

of the noble and mighty, and wise ones of the World, yet ordinarily the Poor have the Gospel preach'd to 'em, and are made to receive it. Our Saviour gives solemn Thanks to his Father, that he had hid these things from the Wise and Prudent, and reveal'd 'em unto Babes. Many wise Philosophers, with all their Learning, have been thrust down to Hell, when a poor unlearned Christian, notwithstanding his Ignorance of other things, has been exalted to Heaven.

6. *The Doctrines he requires to be taught unto, and receiv'd by his Followers, is another Instance of this.* When the Wisdom of the World is to shape a Religion, it shall be so contriv'd as to make it easily go down; Mahomet's Cup is made luscious and sweet, knowing Men are soon prevail'd upon to espouse what gratifies the Flesh, and will easily deliver themselves into the Hands of those Opinions, that offer fair Quarter to their Lusts. Or if in this, or any other Constitution, as that of Popery, some Austerities should be prescrib'd, it fixes Man upon his own Bottom, by making them meritorious; and as the one gratifies his Lusts, the other feeds his Pride. Men are willing to be at some Expence and Trouble in Religion, may they have the Honour of saving themselves.

But the Gospel is a Mystery of Godliness. It lays the Ax to the Root of every Lust; teaches and enables Men to deny all Ungodliness; to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present World. Tho' it affirms
our

our being justified by another's Righteousness, (for by *one Man's Obedience, many are made righteous*) yet it maintains the Necessity of good Works, and strictly obliges Men to the Exercise of a universal Holiness, as that, *without which no Man shall see the Lord*; and yet, to hide Pride from Men, teaches them after all, to acknowledge they are but unprofitable Servants.

In a word, the Disciples of our Lord proclaim'd a Doctrine most repugnant to Flesh and Blood, and directly opposite to Mens worldly Interests. They, as well as their Master, prepar'd Men to expect Troubles, Afflictions and Persecutions; exhorted them to a Contempt of the World; to deny themselves, as to their Honour, Ease, and present Interests, and follow the Lamb where-soever he went. They recommended Humility to a proud World; and of an uncharitable World requir'd Love even to their Enemies; and taught a revengeful World to receive and forgive Injuries, &c. and what could there be in all this to recommend it self to Mankind? But thus God made foolish the Wisdom of this World.

7. *This appears in the Encouragements propounded to those that embrace these Doctrines, and submit to such Precepts.* Human Policy directs a Scheme, wherein all worldly Advantages shall be propounded to the Votaries of Religion. In the Account of worldly Wisdom, it would be necessary for Christ to attemper his Doctrine to Mens sensual In-

F
clinations

clinations and worldly Interests; and therefore to make large Promises of Riches, Honours, Pleasure and Ease, to those that most distinguish themselves by a Proficiency in his Doctrine, and a Zeal for his Service. Did all Preferments lie on the side of Religion, and were this the surest way to rise in the World; might his Disciples and Followers expect for *that* Reason, to have Places and Preferments, to be made great and honourable, Lords and Nobles, to wear Stars and Garters; many would then embrace his Religion, as the *Shechemites* submitted even to Circumcision, for the sake of that worldly Advantage they hoped to reap by it.

But herein God makes foolish the Wisdom of this World; he bribes no Men into his Measures by the Prospects of outward Advantage: He gives them no Expectation of a Crown, but prepares them for the Cross, *If any Man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his Cross.* So far is he from giving him any Reason to expect he shall gain the Treasures he *has not*, by his Profession of Religion, he prepares him to *part with* even those that he has for the sake of the Gospel. The way of strict Religion don't lead to Honour and Preferments in Kings Courts, but sometimes to Prisons, Dungeons, Banishment, and Death it self. It's observ'd by almost every one on this Occasion, that in the Primitive Times there was hardly a Tribunal to which the Christians were not cited, or a Torture which they did not endure.

Mat. 16.
24.

ture. The Doctrines of the Gospel never court the Senses, nor at all gratify the Flesh, by promising the Splendour of Life, the Profits of the World, or the Pleasures of Sin : But teach us rather to be crucified to all these, and content our selves with a Re-compence at present in *Spiritual* Comforts, and hereafter with that of an *Heavenly* Inheritance.

Now this, says the Wisdom of the World, is the most absurd thing imaginable ; who will ever be Disciples upon these Terms ? But herein God makes foolish the Wisdom of this World,

He propounds the *truest* Pleasures in his Service here, and the *Fulness* of Pleasure in his Presence hereafter ; but as for present Temporal Rewards, he gives no Man Reason to expect them, but rather prepares him for the contrary. And yet this way shall godown ; he will have Followers upon these Terms : Such as can forget their worldly Interests, trample upon every thing here that's inconsistent with their Profession ; and be content to be stripp'd, bereav'd ; and when call'd to it, take joyfully the spoiling of their Goods, yea, the Loss of their Lives, not counting these too dear for him, who thought not his dearest Blood too great a Price for their Redemption.

Thus, in these several Instances, we have seen How, and By what God makes foolish the Wisdom of this World. For what Reason

son he does so, comes next to be consider'd.
I proceed therefore to enquire,

III. Why God thus makes foolish the Wisdom of this World?

1. Reason. *This is done to make it evidently appear, that the Christian Religion is no humane Contrivance, nor the spreading of it an Effect of Man's Wisdom and Power; but that the whole is of God.* Had he proceeded in another Method, and shap'd a Religion according to the Dictates of worldly Wisdom; and pursuant to these, had he accommodated himself to Mens secular Interests, and indulg'd their sensual Appetites, the whole would have been thought the Politick Contrivance of some subtle and designing Men, to serve a base and sinister End. Whereas now, such a Suggestion is the most absurd and unreasonable one in the World. If the Gospel be a contriv'd Fable, and the Effect only of Man's Cunning and Policy, it's certainly one of the worst contrived Fables in the World for its Authors; was it design'd to subserve their own Interests, they were surely the most mistaken of all Creatures, and consulted the worst for themselves imaginable. This then can never be from Men, since it has nothing in its whole Frame and Contrivance that looks like human Policy. And if not from Men or by Men, we must conclude it certainly is from God; both the Doctrine it self and the Success of it.

We

We can fix on no lower a Cause hereof than the Wisdom of Heaven, and no less an Author than the great God himself.

Had Men, remarkably furnish'd with a Stock of Learning and Eloquence, and arm'd with Worldly Power and Authority, been employ'd in spreading the Christian Faith, the Success of it might have been thought owing to the force of their Reasonings; and that Persons so generally gave into it from the fear of what they should lose if they refus'd, or the hopes of what they should gain if they complied; and all was owing to the Helps and Advantages the World afforded to it.

But when we see Persons employ'd in this Design, labouring under all outward Disadvantages, destitute of all Worldly Power; Men of no Birth, nor Education: nor furnish'd with any *uncommon* Measure of *natural* Gifts, or *acquir'd* Learning, laden with the utmost Contempt and Reproach, &c.

When such Men as these make powerful Conquests in the World, obtain the greatest Victories over the Lusts of Men; demolish the strong Holds of Satan; prevail with great Numbers chearfully to renounce the Idolatries in which they had been born and bred, and pay Homage to a new Lord, who obliged 'em for his sake to quit their Worldly Interest, and undergo the worst of Sufferings: who does not in all this see the Finger of God? The Discourse and Behaviour of Acts 4.
the 13.

the Apostles when conven'd before them, surpriz'd their Enemies themselves. They gaz'd on one another, and wondred, when they saw the Boldness of *Peter* and *John*, and knew that in themselves they were ignorant, and illiterate Men. They wonder whence these Men should have this Learning and this Courage. But what need that? The Thing evidences it self. Whence should they have it but from God? *They had been with Jesus*. Divine Wisdom inspir'd and conducted 'em, and they were supported by no less a Power. Their Doctrine was from Heaven, not a Fable of their own contriving. It was neither of Man, nor by Man, and therefore must be from God. The whole Design is carried on in Methods so very different from, yea, repugnant to the Ways and Thoughts of Men, that we must conclude it to be truly Divine. God would subdue the World to himself in such a way, that the most obstinate and unbelieving should be made to acknowledge the Work was done by himself alone without the Art of Man.

2. Reason. To hide Pride from Man, That no Flesh might glory in his Presence. God takes this Method to humble the Creature, that he may not think of himself above that which is meet. Let not the wise Man now glory in his Wisdom, what this can invent and contrive, what this can reach and comprehend; nor in his Strength, what that can perform. *The very foolishness of God is wiser than*

than Man, and the weakness of God stronger than Man. How foolish does God make the Wisdom of Man, by discovering what never entred into his Head to invent, nor can enter into his Heart to comprehend? Having only this resort, because it exceeds his grasp, it shall not command his belief; and not being able to tell how these, and the other Things can be, resolves never to believe they are.

The Way also of God's propagating the Gospel serv'd to hide Pride from Man. You see, says the Apostle, what Methods God takes, what Men he employs in calling you; and who they are, that for the most part are made obedient to the Faith of the Gospel; Persons of little Esteem in the World on the account of their Birth, Education, Learning, Wealth, or Honour: *But God has chosen the foolish Things of the World to confound the wise, and the weak Things of the World to confound the mighty; and base Things of the World, and Things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and Things which are not, to bring to nought Things that are:* And the Reason of all is, *That no Flesh might glory in his Presence.* That no Man who had the Honour to be employed in Calling others, or the Happiness to be called himself, shou'd once imagine, that 'tis by any Power, or Holiness, or Wisdom of his own, these extraordinary Effects were produc'd; or that he was singled out to be a partaker of this Grace, because of
any

1 Cor. 1.

26.

Ver. 29.

The Wisdom of this World

any peculiar Excellencies in himself above the common level of Mankind. The Treasure is put into earthen Vessels, that the excellency of Power and Wisdom may be of God and not of Man. Man in this glorious Conquest shall count himself nothing; as unfit and unlikely to accomplish such a Design, as *Gideon's* three Hundred Men, with nothing but Lamps and Pitchers, were to rout an Army of *Midianites*, like Grasshoppers for Number. Their Enemies themselves thought it so, and insulted them, (as perhaps the Men of *Jericho* laughed at seven Priests blowing with seven Rams-horns to throw down their Walls) *What will this Babeler say?* Are these poor simple and ignorant Creatures the Men that must turn the World upside down? Must all our Learning and Power be confounded by them? Are these Striplings a fit Match for the mighty *Goliaths* against whom they are going forth? But thus God orders it, and on purpose that no Flesh should † glory in his presence.

Acts 17.
11.

3. *Reason.* That all the Glory of our Salvation might be given to God. All the Honour shall be ascribed to himself, and none must share it with him. He will have no
Flesh

† Hoc modo fastum eorum, dejecit neque eos sc. Corinthios ignobiles Deus pratulerat nobilibus & sapientibus illis ut superbirent, sed ut in Domino gloriari cogerentur, &c. Beza.

Flesh glory in his presence, *But he that glories let him glory in the Lord. We have this Treasure in earthen Vessels, the Knowledge and Ministry of the Gospel in Persons, frail, weak and contemptible, like Gideon's earthen Pitchers, That the Power which shews it self in the success of our Endeavours might evidently appear to be of God; and he might have all the Glory. And when the Apostle tells the Corinthians that his Speech and Preaching was not with the enticing Words of Man's Wisdom, it was for this Reason, That their Faith might not stand in the Wisdom of Men, but the Power of God. He wou'd not have it thought, that the spreading of Christianity in the World was owing to, or effected meerly by the force of Mens Arguments, and the strength of their Reasonings, but rather the effect of a divine Power, that the Instrument might be nothing, and God might be all.*

I come now in the last Place,

IV. To apply what has been said in the following Particulars. If this be, as we have heard, the Design of God; then,

Inference 1. It's highly improbable he should, and injurious to him to suppose he has at any Time fram'd a Religion, and establish'd therein Rites and Ceremonies in compliance with, and conformity to the Modes and Customs of Heathen Nations. If God has on purpose so order'd Things, as to make Foolish the Wisdom of this World,

we have very little Reason to believe what some tell us, * That most of the Customs in the Jewish Constitution, their Tabernacle, Temple, Feasts, Altars, Ark, Cherubins, Sacrifices, Expiation, &c. were in Imitation of Heathen Usages: Nay, that the Rise and Original of Christianity, the very Author of it, the Mysteries in it, and many of the Transactions that attended it, were taken from Pagan Customs. That Christianity to comply with the Heathens, much given to admire Mysteries in Religion, has its Mysteries too; and particularly the Incarnation. That because there was a strong inclination in Mankind to worship a visible Deity; to comply with this fondness, God appear'd in our Nature: And because a Notion had commonly obtain'd amongst 'em concerning the expiation of Sin, and appea-
sing

* Quod itaque Deus sub Vet. Fadere, non tam pie sed & splendide coli, &c. non sue Naturæ, sed Gentium viori tribuendum est. Cum itaque Gentium simulachra, cista, &c. omni cultu & ornatu insignia redderentur; credimus primum est, Deum Israelitis aureos cherubinos, Arcam, &c. concessisse, ne prava æmulatio pungeret eorum Animos, cum viderent Ethnicorum imagines cistas & sacra alia, ubique splendescere & pueriles eorum Animæ cultu simplici & infra superstitionis ethnica pompam subsidentia offenderentur. Spencer. de leg. Hebræa, Lib. 3. p. 221. Egyptij ut æthiopia ita & Religione gentes ceteras præcesserunt: eorum Ritus ad alios Populos transfati, etiam ab Ebræis, (non sine emendatione forsan) usurpati sunt. Ut elucescat hujus assertionis veritas; Indisquisitionem veniant eorum Festa; Sacrificia; Sacerdotia; id genus alia, &c. Marsh. Can. Chron. p. 189.

sing their Deities by Sacrifice, God was pleas'd so far to comply with this Custom, as to make a general Atonement by the Sacrifice of his Son. In a Word, That God has very much suited the Dispensation of the Gospel, and the Method of Salvation by it, to the common Prejudices of Mankind, and especially the Heathen World.

How little pretence can there be for all this? What more improbable and unlikely? Can we imagine the infinitely wise God hath shap'd a Religion according to the Dictates of the Wisdom of this World, when he has on purpose made it Foolish, by acting in so many Instances perfectly the Reverse unto it?

Inference 2. Hence we have a plain and clear Account of that Contempt which is pour'd on the Gospel, and whence it is that so many, especially of the great and learned Part of the World, rejected it. Men that most excell'd in natural Wisdom, have been the greatest despisers of supernatural Truths. The Rabbies amongst the Jews, stumbled at the Gospel as weak and mean; the Philosophers among the Gentiles laugh'd at it as foolish and absurd. And no wonder, when its whole Constitution was so directly opposite to their darling Notions, and beloved Schemes. God never design'd to gain upon Mens belief by accommodating himself to their vain Humours, sensual Appetites, or secular Interest, and it's not to be wondred at, if their corrupt Inclinations dislik'd the

1 Cor.
2. 14.

Purity of Divine Precepts, as the Pride of their Understandings despis'd the Simplicity of Gospel Doctrines. The natural Man receives not the Things of God, for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Inference 3. Then there is no Reason to reject any Doctrines that are really and clearly revealed in the Gospel, because they are not obvious to our Reason, nor fully comprehended by it. The great Design of God in the Gospel is to exalt his own Wisdom and Sovereignty, and debase the high Thoughts, and carnal Reasonings of Man, and hence it is, that what appears to us most rational and plausible is not always nearest to Truth: Nay sometimes, the less there seems to be of Human Reason, and probability in some Doctrines, and the more strange they are to our natural Conceptions, the greater impress there is of a Divine Authority upon them. These are Things to be believ'd upon the Credit of him that reveals them, and not to be entertain'd or rejected as they agree with, or differ from the mould of our Reason. What if there are some Things which exceed our grasp, and too deep for us to fathom? God hereby shews us the shortness of our Line; and by revealing what to much exceeds its Comprehension, makes Foolish the Wisdom of this World.

Inference 4. It's no wonder then, That the great Apostle did, and others with him do, desire and determine in their Preaching to know nothing

nothing so much as, nothing but Christ and him Crucified. This indeed is foolishness in the Account of worldly Wisdom. Be it so, says the Apostle, I determin'd nevertheless to *1 Cor. know nothing among you, you wise, you learn- 2. 2. ed Corinthians, nothing but, nothing so much as this despised Doctrine of Christ and him Crucified. This is the Doctrine which does, and always shall triumph in all my Discourses, and which I am assur'd will ever gain the greatest Triumphs in the World. By this very Doctrine it is, That God makes Foolish the Wisdom of this World. And compar'd with this, I despise all the Pharisaical Wisdom of the Jews, and the Philosophical Learning of the Greeks. † Plain † Reflections upon Learning, p. 242. Scripture Truths have something in them more convincing than all rational Arguments; such a Power as is not easily resisted. Rational Arguments are refell'd by Reason, and its hard to convince a Man by these Methods who is equally Master of Reason with our selves; whereas Divine Truths make their own Way, act upon us with a secret Power, and press the Mind with an irresistible Strength, not only perswading, but almost forcing an Assent. To which purpose that Passage in Ecclesiastical History has been often referr'd to, which I'll here give you in the Words of the foremention'd Author, ' Upon the convening of the Council of Nice, and the appearing of the Christian Bishops there, several of the Heathen Philosophers offer'd themselves among*

Reflections upon Learning, p. 243.

The Wisdom of this World

‘ among them, intending to signalize them-
 ‘ selves upon so great an Occasion, by at-
 ‘ tacking the Faith in its most eminent Pro-
 ‘ fessors, and by endeavouring to overthrow
 ‘ it by Philosophy and Reason. To this end se-
 ‘ veral Conferences were held upon the Prin-
 ‘ ciples of Reason, by the most noted Men
 ‘ of either Party, in which one of the Philo-
 ‘ sophers, more forward than the rest, begun
 ‘ to grow insolent upon a suppos’d Advantage,
 ‘ and must needs triumph before the Victory:
 ‘ An aged Bishop took Fire at this, one who
 ‘ had been a Confessor in the late Persecuti-
 ‘ on, and was more noted for his Faith than
 ‘ his Learning; Philosophy he had none, but
 ‘ encounters his Adversary in a new manner
 ‘ in the Name of Jesus, and by the Word of
 ‘ God; and with a few plain Weapons drawn
 ‘ from thence, he humbled the Pride of this
 ‘ arrogant Philosopher, and straightway
 ‘ leads him Captive to the Font. All the
 ‘ Reply our Philosopher had left him, was,
 ‘ that while he was encountred by Philoso-
 ‘ phy, and humane Learning, he defended
 ‘ himself the same way, but being attack’d
 ‘ by higher Reasons, it was necessary for
 ‘ him to yield himself up to the Power of
 ‘ God.’

*Inference 5. We should hence learn to exercise
 great Humility, and not think of our selves, and
 our own Wisdom above that which is meet. God
 hath stain’d the Pride and Glory of Man;
 He will have no Flesh glory in his Presence.
 The wise Man must not glory in his Wisdom.*

His

His natural, his corrupted Reason, a Thing he is too prone to do in such flights as these. Great is the Goddess Reason; I only yield to Reason: Reason shall be the supreme Judge, and Philosophy the highest Principle; nothing shall be receiv'd but what this comprehends.

But is God's Ocean to be emptied by our Shell? Or his Depths to be sounded by our Line? Are not his Ways and Thoughts as far above ours, as the Heavens are above the Earth? Must we be reason'd out of Revelation, and run into a Natural Religion?

Let us not deceive our selves by a vain Conceit of our own Wisdom. If any Man among you seem to be Wise, let him become a Fool that he may be wise. Let us adore the Wisdom of God in the way of Salvation by a crucified Christ. What if this be a Laughing-stock to some, and a Stumbling-block to others, to them that are saved it's the Wisdom and Power of God. That glorious Dispensation wherein he magnifies his Power, and displays his Wisdom in such a manner as to make Foolish the Wisdom of this World. This may teach us Modesty, and keep us humble.

Inference 6. If God has reveal'd those Things to us by which he makes Foolish the Wisdom of this World, we have abundant cause to adore the Riches and Sovereignty of his Grace To some, as our Saviour tells Mat. 13. his Disciples, It's given to know the Mysteries 11. of the Kingdom, but to others it's not given.

Has

The Wisdom of this World, &c.

Has God then given you Eyes to see what others know not? Do you behold the Glory of God's Wisdom and Power in this Constitution as far Superiour to all the Designs and Contrivances of Men? Hath God revealed those Things to you which the natural Man receiveth not, nor can know whilst he is so, because to him they are Foolishness? Then imitate the Son of God in giving Thanks to his Father for this inestimable Favour, *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, that thou hast hid these Things from the wise and prudent; from Men that excel in the Wisdom of this World, and are therefore highly conceited of their own Knowledge, and hast revealed 'em unto Babes; to Men of weaker Capacities, and that have more humble and meaner Thoughts of themselves. Even so Father, so it seemed good in thy sight.* This can never arise from any Worth or Excellency in them above others, but is purely the effect of God's Sovereign Pleasure, *That no Flesh should glory in his presence, but he that glories might glory in the Lord.*

Mat. 11.
25.

F I N I S.